

## KNOWLEDGE VERSUS TRUTH by *John Gibbons* (2013)

In this paper, J. Gibbons attempts to articulate his version of subjectivism. The central hypothesis is the conception of belief as *commitment*, in contrast to the view of rationality as a means promoted by objectivism. He further clarifies his view by arguing that belief not only commits you to  $p$  being true, but also to knowledge.

### *Critique of the teleological picture*

G. starts by presenting the general objectivist thesis, i.e. a belief aims at knowledge or truth. Thus, he asserts, in accordance with this idea, justification can be understood as the appearance of knowledge or truth. To better elucidate this relationship, he draws an analogy from the realm of ethics, where motivating reasons are to be understood as the appearance of/or belief about objective reasons. Moving forward with his examination of objectivism's claims, he asserts that as regards with a rule or set of standards the following can be said:

1. Acting in accord with the rule is a good thing regardless of evidence and justification/reasons.
2. Acting in accord with the rule is reasonable.

But sometimes, he points out, the two things hold a *tidy* connection:

3. Evidence that acting in accord with the rule would be a good thing makes it reasonable to accept the rule.

Against the objectivist view, the author maintains that beliefs about objective reasons can't always rationally move us, in the way that genuine or subjective reasons can. Adding that even if the tidy connection usually holds, it does not constitute a good picture of the interrelation between the big three (TJB). Then Gibson delves deeper on his critique of the teleological understanding of B (B aims at  $K \vee T$ , or B aims at something objective,  $K \oplus T$  and J is something like a means to this end). The problem he finds is that, our beliefs must be caused not only by our desire to  $K \vee T$ , but also by our means: end beliefs about where to get it. It seems to him that both are rationally superfluous in the ordinary case, hence the rule that one should believe what's true is in principle impossible to follow. But if we refuse rule following, we reject the teleological picture. If the only thing mattering is rule following, it is the same thing whether you take the umbrella as a means or because it rains, what is crucial is to act in accordance with the rule.

### *Derivative value and the clash between normative and evaluative notions*

The one notion out of the teleological picture which the author finds attractive, is the notion of *derivative value*. Even by denying the claim of J being a means to  $K \vee T$ , the significance, value, importance of J is coming from  $K \vee T$ ; in cases of JFB we can't counter that J can only be appearance of J. The problem in accepting this conclusion is not only its counterintuitiveness. There is a clash between normative (NN) and evaluative notions (EN). NN should guide us in a serious way and be accessible to us in a serious way. Those notions of guidance and access are not

the ones which distinguish the EN from the NN. G. agrees there to be a way to distinguish them, but giving all the picture up for it seems a price too high to pay for.

He claims that better option requires a subjectivist account of the intuitions that lead to objectivism. Trying to reject the objective standard to B, he claims, is no better than trying to reject the subjective one. The problem is that it seems both are considered in epistemic practices as decisive, the adherence to them is clear, what is unclear is how to accept a total sets of standards who are incoherent. There seems to be three mutually inconsistent sets of norms. According to the author, the objectivist doesn't do a good job at dismissing the subjectivist's intuitions. He interprets Williams' idea, that of belief aiming at the truth, in the following terms. To believe that  $p$  just is to believe that  $p$  is true; evidence that  $p$  just is evidence that  $p$  is true. But, G. proclaims, to desire that  $p$  has nothing to do with  $p$  being true. Still, there is a connection between  $p$  and  $p$  being true and evidence which has to be explained. If J is the norm of B, then the standards of rationality are automatically relevant whenever anyone believes anything. If these standards bring a concern for K and T, then G. insists we can explain the objectivist intuitions with the subjectivist ones.

### *The commitment hypothesis*

The connection is tentatively comprehended in these terms. By believing that  $p$ , you're committed to  $p$ 's being true. This distinguish belief from other propositional attitudes (PA), as desiring or imagining that  $p$ , does not commit you to  $p$ 's being true. The author mentions the PA of guessing as something clearly different from believing and not committed to K, but only to T. So, while this commitment to T sets belief aside from many PA, it doesn't from all. G. continues by contending that belief commits you to knowing that  $p$ , although knowledge can't be seen as the norm of belief. He then starts his attempt at explaining the formerly illustrated objectivist intuitions in subjective terms, by explaining what he means with aiming at and committing to. While refusing again the teleological picture for its problematic nature, he proposes a new one based on desire satisfaction (DS). He claims DS to be epistemically objective. S's desire for  $p$  is satisfied, if and only if  $p$ . From the perspective of DS it is irrelevant the accidentality of the connection. He proceeds advancing that then this accidentality cannot be called a means, if the contingent means had an independent significance, it would see revoked its nature as means.

But, he adds, if S were to do something for R, then suddenly the means would definitely matter. As the action would be rationally caused by R, who would constitute the sense making of it. It becomes now relevant whether S gets  $p$  by accident. G. now proposes thinking about objective aims of belief as K. The justification for a belief doesn't impact its truth, but determines knowledge. After explaining the mechanism of doing things for reasons, he asserts that nonetheless we do not have to keep track of all the reasons for which we believe something true. He quickly dismisses the idea with the following argument. He has no idea how he started believing that the Eiffel tower is to be found in Paris, yet this constitutes clearly a fact. From it he derives, that even though our total plan may represent us, as doing this for a particular reason, our total view does not represent us, as believing everything for reasons. So, G. proceeds, the PA of intending, contrary to that of desiring, creates commitments. When S commits, S makes his mind up to  $p$ , and that means to  $p$ 's being true. S, for G., could theoretically be unaware of J, but he will still be bound at least to some assessment of J. That is why he claims, that believing that  $p$ , does not commits S

only to  $p$  being true, but to knowing that  $p$ . Our author subsequently clarifies the meaning of commitment. It is not the same as e.g. embracing wholeheartedly a cause.  $G.$  intends commitment as the consequence entailed by holding a certain belief.  $S$  believes that  $p$ ,  $p$  entails  $q$  whether  $S$  is aware of it or not. This is described as the objective notion of commitment. When believing that  $p$ , if  $q$  is false, then the belief that  $p$  is false, independently of the accessibility of its knowledge. The wrongness is not about a standard, but about  $S$ 's POV; the failure consequently, according to  $G.$ , although connected to  $S$ 's POV, is independent from  $S$ 's ability to assess it.

The set of standards governing beliefs (SSGB) are  $S$ 's standards. To clarify it, he offers the following example of SSGB. To some optimists, if it would be good that  $p$ ,  $S$  should be more inclined to believe that  $p$ , even by weighting the same evidence. So, if  $S$  believes that  $p$ , considering only the evidence, this would be a wrong for the optimist's SSGB, but not for  $S$ 's POV. The author then elucidate it with the notion of taking a stand. If  $S$  takes a stand, he decides, whether or not to believe that  $p$ , he is making a claim on how the world is. Because of this reason, it becomes crucial to  $S$  if the world actually corresponds to his picture. He then ends this section, by stating that despite the fact of the test being stated subjectively, what is being tested for is definitely objective. If  $S$ 's belief that  $p$  was false, then according to SSGB, this was a problem for  $S$  all along, even before and if  $S$  did find out that it was a problem.

### *On defeasibilism*

In the next chapter  $G.$  starts by introducing a commonly-found distinction, between two types of defeaters for justification. Overriding defeaters (OD) provide evidence that  $B$  is false, undermining defeaters (UD) are said to be harder to describe, they are usually understood as providing evidence that the connection between  $J$  and  $B$  is false. But, as the author demonstrates with the Pollock example, this does not mean that  $B$  is false, it only mean that  $J$  is not the right reason. So, in the case that  $p$  is true, but the reason doesn't hold, it would only accidentally (Gettier-like) lead to the facts. Hence, an UA can only make us withhold judgment.

$G.$  understands the core argument of defeasibility theory as being not the evidence of  $q$  (where  $q$  is what keeps  $s$  from knowing), mandating  $s$  to revise the belief that  $p$ . But the evidence of  $q$  as what defeats the justification for believing that  $p$ . But the instance of  $q$  by itself alone, in the author's view, it cannot count as an explanation for why  $S$  has to revise the belief that  $p$ . On the other hand, he is confident that if believing that  $p$ , is to be interpreted through his central commitment hypothesis, then we will have a fair understanding of why  $S$  is to revise, covering all different cases.

Subsequently,  $G.$  asserts that UD are reasons to believe  $S$  is not in a position to know (i.e. the belief is insensitive, unsafe, etc.), as also OD are. Hence, clarifying what defeaters hold in common, by the lens of his hypothesis, he concludes that instead of defining the notion of knowledge in terms of defeaters for justification, we should define defeaters for justification in terms of knowledge. He afterwards proceeds further with the elucidation of UD, by analyzing deeper Pollock's view. The latter's is understood as defining UD as a reason ( $q$ ) to deny the proposition  $r$  *would not be true unless  $p$  were true*, where  $r$  is the reason for believing that  $p$ .  $G.$  does not agree with this picture, and offers a counterexample in conflict with the theory based on safety.  $S$  knows where he

has parked his car because he always parks his car there and his neighborhood is a safe one. The fact that the car is actually not there, because of a robbery, for G. cannot mean that  $r_1$  and  $r_2$  (the two reasons for which S believes the car to be there) are false. An isolated robbery won't deny  $r_2$ , as the blatant fact of the car not being there, will not falsify  $r_1$  (S's belief of having actually parked the car in the usual spot). He ends thus the argument, stating that the claim that sensitivity is necessary for knowledge is doubtful.

G. eventually extends his critique of Pollock's conditional, insisting that it does not undermine justification when  $r$  comes from reflecting on possible worlds semantics for subjunctives. It cannot qualify as a reason to believe that S does not know where the car is. The unlikelihood of events plays no role within sensitivity theory, but to G. it does as regards to knowledge. He advances another counterexample in favor of the latter claim: if S's belief that  $2 + 2 = 4$  was not causally related to the corresponding fact, the falsification of  $r$  would not falsify the belief that  $p$ . The author illuminates further his position, the connection that UD attacks is the one which stands when the grounds puts S in a position to know. And this he then declares is safety, so he defines UD as attacking safety, if knowing that  $p$  is to be seen as safely believing that  $p$ .

G. finally ends the section with a comment on Humberstone's story. Belief has to be revised here, because the information (q) showed that there was something wrong with S's reasons from his POV. It is not that these beliefs are not good themselves, or are not reliable (as clearly on the opposite the example illustrates), but the reason for which they are believed are not the right ones. And they are not right as they do not put S in the position to know that  $p$ .

### *On belief*

In the next section our author returns on the old Gettier problem, promoting a perspective from safety grounds. If S holds a justified belief but still does not know, this belief can be either false or Gettierized. But, that is his argument, it cannot be said that S was being unreasonable, on the contrary, holding that belief was the only reasonable thing to do. Then, he maintains that thusly K appears as JTB + X. The latter is identified with everything which in Gettier cases rules out knowledge. However, according to this vision, K would look as a sort of accretion, an extra, which is not always presents and which leaves intact justification. Yet, G. states, within the understanding of B as commitment to K in the POV of S, K it really does matter. And that is why for S the question of whether he has to believe that  $p$ , is not independent from whether he knows that  $p$ . If that was not the case, hypothetically S would come to believe something like this: *P but I don't know that*. Which the author outlines as Moore paradoxical, owing to its internal incoherence.

### *The Lottery paradox*

In this following section, G. confronts himself with this aforementioned classic problem. He asserts that, as regards to knowledge, it is not simply a matter of whether is possible to err, it looks as if the likelihood of the error does matter. In the lottery case, what we must see, he holds, is that beliefs about the future are grounded upon induction, not deduction. He quotes a couple of examples, such as the belief that the door will open and how they are all based on probability; yet here our intuition does not clash with the idea of them constituting knowledge. He subsequently proceeds in analyzing two versions of skepticism, one weaker and one stronger. While the latter

succeeds at avoiding the Moore paradox, it seriously defies common sense; for not only denies that the proposition about the door constitutes knowledge, but it denies its justification too.

He moves on then, by considering a different approach. Namely, the possibility to reject the formal closure principles. This is elaborated as a worst-case scenario for the non-skeptic, where S is justified in believing, only of each singular ticket to be the loser (and he qualifies it as knowledge). And what keeps S from knowing that *p* is falsity, not Gettierization or absence of evidence. He additionally states, that a prediction about a door opening, as a ticket losing, is not the result of chance. While, if S does fail to predict so, then it would be a matter of luck.

### *Why knowledge?*

In this concluding section, G. delves more extensively on his hypothesis and its underlying connection. He highlights his stand, by attempting to ask the following question. Why believing that *p* commits you to knowing that *p*? He answers by remarking that, if S's belief that *p* is rooted in *r*, then S is committed to *r* being true. And that's for the reason that in the moment in which S believes that *p*, he is not just wishing it to be so, attempting to get it rightly. S is committed to knowing that *p*, he claims. If S is just guessing that *p*, he is actually withholding the judgment, but as S believes that *p*, the latter is no more an open question. And if that was not so, then that would be no belief at all. In other words, what the author is arguing for, is that when S believes that *p* he ought to hold to certain standards; the basic being evidence and this is characterized as a genuine connection to facts (e.g. seeing that *p*, figuring it out based on other facts, being told etc.). The evidence can obviously be deceiving, but it is what S commits to, a connection to the world. And he adds, this connection is not just sensitivity or safety, but knowledge.

In justification, he contends, there is a picture of how when things go well. S believes that *p* on the basis of when things go well, things S is in a position to know. When things go well, the relation transmits knowledge, but believing commits S to things going well. To better explicate his position, G. offers a different approach to consider the practical case analogy. In the attitude of intention, S is committed to A-ing if he does intend to A, and there is something wrong from S's POV if he fails to do so. As intending, differently from wanting, involves a decision on what to do, but not only that, it does also involve doing them for the right reasons. And he sums all up by declaring that then what S obtains is not only a connection to the world, but what we may say the right connection to it.

He concludes the weighty essay, by stating that beliefs carry with them a built-in set of objective standards and its reasons can be good, without having to remember or even having to be aware of them. Reasons not putting S in a position to know, are not enough from the objective POV, hence S has to revise when acquires *q* insofar as it does not keep up with SSGB. So, as he showed in the practical example, if s's B is rooted in the right J for the right reason, it accounts to K. This being an actual connection and not a match with the world. Finally, G. asserts that if S believes that *p*, it is because he thinks it to be within his ken, if this turns out according to SSGB to be a failure, it was not within his ken after all.

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